

San Joaquin Valley braces for sub-freezing nights, possible citrus damage



A fire provides some relief from the cold for homeless men near the Poverello House in downtown Fresno on Tuesday morning, Dec. 30, 2014. JOHN WALKER — THE FRESNO BEE | [Buy Photo](#)

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Valley citrus growers and emergency shelters are bracing for sub-freezing nights over the next couple of days as a sometimes blustery arctic air mass settled over much of California.

Winds from the air mass raked the Sierra foothills, knocking out power Tuesday night to nearly 4,000 Pacific Gas & Electric Co. customers in Oakhurst, Bass Lake, Coarsegold and other foothill areas further north, PG&E spokeswoman Jana Morris said.

The rash of outages started around 4:30 p.m. Morris said PG&E assessment teams had reached most of the outages by Tuesday night, and repair teams were working to fix the major Oakhurst outage, involving about 2,800 customers. All power was restored by Wednesday morning.

The National Weather Service in Hanford issued a hard freeze warning from Wednesday evening through Thursday morning from Merced to Bakersfield. Overnight lows could range from 21 to 27 degrees for up to eight hours, the weather service said. In Fresno, overnight temperatures were expected to dip to 31 overnight Tuesday, 27 on Wednesday and 32 on Thursday. Daytime highs are expected to remain in the upper 40s to low 50s through Friday.



California Citrus Mutual, an Exeter-based citrus growers lobby, warned that the cold temperatures could harm the Valley's \$1.5 billion citrus crop.

"We're getting pretty nervous about it, to be quite honest with you," said Joel Nelsen, president of California Citrus Mutual.

When temperatures drop to 32 degrees or lower for four hours, mandarins are at risk of freeze damage. At 28 degrees or lower for four hours, navel oranges and lemons can be hurt.

Citrus Mutual said a damaging freeze could affect 75% of this year's crop.

A punishing freeze last year cost Valley citrus growers \$434 million in revenue, according to industry estimates.

The cold temperatures are the result of a very cold low-pressure system followed by an arctic air mass dropping through the state, the National Weather Service said.

Besides the freeze watch in the Valley, a mix of watches and warnings were posted on the central and far north coasts. Wind warnings and watches blanketed the Sierra Nevada and much of the rest of Northern California, and winter storm warnings were issued for the mountains of San Diego County and inland counties of Southern California.

In Southern California, officials were warning people planning to camp out overnight Wednesday for Pasadena's annual Rose Parade to come prepared for frigid temperatures.

"Be ready and know that it's going to be very cold here," Pasadena Fire Chief Bertral Washington told a news conference. "We just want them to be prepared, and we want to make sure that they're going to be safe and warm when they do camp out."

The city of Fresno arranged temporary overnight shelter at the Fresno Rescue Mission, 310 G St. The Rescue Mission will open its warming center whenever the overnight temperature dips below 35 degrees, the city said.

To reach someone at the Fresno Rescue Mission before 5 p.m., call (559) 268-0839; after 5 p.m., call (559) 444-0451.

The Visalia Rescue Mission will offer shelter whenever overnight temperatures are expected to be below 30 degrees, the city's fire department said. The Rescue Mission is at 322 NE First Ave. in Visalia. Call (559) 740-4178 for more information.

In addition, the Visalia Rescue Mission has opened its new Community Center for nights when the temperature is expected to be 40 or below. The Community Center is at 741 N. Santa Fe and will provide blankets and staff to monitor the open room.

Meteorologist Gary Sanger with the weather service in Hanford said the cold snap will provide a contrasting end to 2014 — Fresno's warmest year since record-keeping began in 1887. This year's average daily temperature of 69.3 was a full two degrees above averages in 2013, the second-warmest year on record. Fresno's average daily temperature of 52.8 in December is 6.3 degrees above average and is also on pace to set a new record for the month, Sanger said.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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